

Statement of Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi
House Committee of Veteran's Affairs, Subcommittee on Health
Health Care of Filipino World War II Veterans
June 13, 2002

Chairman Moran, thank you for holding this hearing on the health care of Filipino World War II Veterans. I commend the leadership of my colleague from California, Representative Bob Filner for his tireless work to restore overdue benefits for Filipino Veterans.

The people of the Philippines played a vital role in the outcome of World War II. Fighting a ruthless enemy, which at one point controlled most of East Asia, countless Americans and Filipinos sacrificed their lives to uphold democratic principles. Central to allied victory in the Philippines, and therefore in the Pacific theater, were the courageous efforts of Filipino soldiers, scouts and guerillas.

In 1945, some Filipinos came under U.S. military command as special scouts. U.S. law at the time dictated that any person serving actively in the military would be considered a veteran for benefit purposes and these Filipinos should have been eligible for full veteran's benefits. Shortly after the war however, Congress passed the Rescission Act of 1946, which revoked the full benefits eligibility of these soldiers, even though other Filipino soldiers who they fought side by side with eventually became eligible.

The Rescission Act is a scar on the historical record of the United States. In a time of war, we asked for and received the commitment of these Filipino soldiers to serve under U.S. authority. They were fighting for their country, but they were also fighting for the United States.

Under the leadership of Representative Filner, Representative Patsy Mink, Representative Ben Gilman, and others, Congress has restored partial benefits to many Filipino Veterans, but they still have significant health care needs. I am honored to represent a strong and proud Filipino community, and I know well the challenges facing the Filipino Veterans. One of these veterans, Mr. Castro, is a 77-year-old Filipino World War II Philippine Scout who was severely injured and now receives service-connected disability compensation. Mr. Castro was granted United States citizenship in 1993 and came to America in 1996. Mr. Castro receives less than \$100 from the VA for his service-connected disability, and qualifies for Supplemental Security Income, which makes him eligible for Medicare and MediCal.

In January of 1998, Mr. Castro was diagnosed with a heart disease that required a quadruple bypass. His surgery and treatment were paid for by Medicare and MediCal, because his illness is not related to his service-connected disability, and he can not be admitted to a VA Hospital.

Today, Mr. Castro lives in a single resident occupancy hotel in a run down neighborhood. He does not have any family here to help him. If Mr. Castro could return to the Philippines, he would have the family support he desperately needs. But if he goes home, he will only be eligible to receive 75% of his SSI and his service-connected disability compensation would be

reduced to about \$90. His medical condition requires costly medication and may require hospitalization. Mr. Castro is afraid that he will not have enough money to sustain his life.

Recently, Congressman Filner has introduced the Health Care for Filipino World War II Veterans Act, H.R. 4904, which would provide access to VA medical care for Filipino World War II veterans who live in the United States and are United States citizens or legal permanent residents. The passage of Representative Filner's bill would give Mr. Castro access to VA medical care in the United States.

I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of Representative Filner's bill, which is a good start to providing health care to our deserving Filipino Veterans. In addition to passing H.R. 4904, I urge the members of the Committee to fulfill the commitment the United States made over half a century ago, by passing H.R. 491, the Filipino World War II Veterans Equity Act. This bill would restore all the benefits that were taken away by Congress in the 1946 Rescissions Act.

We should act to provide the necessary and deserved reparations to these proud servicemen. We should honor the dedicated service of these men of war. These courageous soldiers answered our Nation's call to duty in a time of need, and now it is the duty of the United States Government to fulfill our long overdue commitment to them.

Thank you for conducting this important hearing today. I look forward to working with you to give our Filipino veterans the benefits that they deserve.